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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 002218

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/16/2015

TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: JORDANIAN AUTHORITIES DETAIN, RELEASE JOURNALIST
OVER SUICIDE BOMBER STORY

REF: A. AMMAN 2131

[B](#). BAGHDAD 1125

[C](#). BAGHDAD 1138

Classified By: CDA Christopher Henzel for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Post contacts confirm that Jordanian authorities -- reportedly on the orders of Interior Minister Samir Habashneh -- detained for questioning and later released a reporter for Arabic daily al-Ghad on March 14 on suspicion that he fabricated the story that a Jordanian citizen, Raed Mansour al-Banna, had carried out a suicide bombing in Iraq on March 1 (ref A). Two al-Ghad editors were also interrogated in the case. Meanwhile, al-Banna's family -- possibly after being approached by Jordanian security services -- issued a statement claiming that they had not held a "martyrdom celebration" as reported in al-Ghad, and denying that their son was responsible for the Hilla bombing (saying that he had in fact died in Mosul). The family also denounced the killing of innocent Iraqis.

[1](#)2. (C) Against the backdrop of reports that angry Iraqis attacked the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad on March 14 in response to the al-Ghad story (refs B and C), GOJ officials issued public statements emphasizing Jordan's strong stance against terrorism and declaring support for Iraq's security and its people. Members of Jordan's Lower House of Parliament on March 15 issued a statement criticizing the embassy attack and denying any Jordanian responsibility for the Hilla bombing.

[1](#)3. (C) Comment: With the King and his key advisors out of the country, and PM Fayeze reportedly ill, the GOJ response to this controversy has been disjointed. King Abdullah learned of the arrest while en route to Washington on March 15. Abdullah told DCM Hale -- who was traveling with the King -- that he was appalled at Habashneh's move, and ordered the reporter released. There was considerable back-and-forth between the traveling party and GID Chief Khayr (in Washington) and Prime Minister al-Fayez (in Amman) to repair what Palace officials regarded as gross mismanagement of this matter by the government. This chapter may have tipped the balance against al-Fayez, whose performance has been a source of dismay to the King, but who has benefited from the King's loyalty toward favorites even after they have become liabilities. Maneuvering among the King's top aides in Washington to accelerate Fayeze's departure is transparent, with speculation of a successor running from GID Chief Khayr to Foreign Minister al-Mulki. If the King does move to change PMs, he may wait until Fayeze approaches the two-year anniversary mark in the Fall. Meanwhile, he is likely to continue the trend of working around the Prime Minister, with Royal Court Minister al-Rifai and Khayr becoming de facto heads of government. This degree of royal intervention in governmental affairs cuts against the King's long-term ambition for reform, but until he dispenses with Fayeze, he does not have many other options.

[1](#)4. (U) Minimize considered.

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HENZEL